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ICC TO SEEK FCC APPROVAL FOR NUMBER CONSERVATION IN 618 AREA CODE

The Illinois Commerce Commission agreed today to file a petition with the Federal Communications Commission seeking approval of a number pooling plan that would help to conserve unassigned telephone numbers in the 618 area code and postpone the need for a new area code, possibly for several years into the future.

The Commission also suggested that it would consider a geographic split of the current 618 area code, as a permanent remedy when all prefixes in the code have been distributed. A proposed order before the Commission last month, recommended that a new area code overlay the current area code.

Commission Chairman Richard Mathias said Tuesday information from the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA) indicates only 27 percent of the numbers in the 618 area code are being used. Number pooling, in which telecommunications companies return unused blocks of numbers for reallocation in smaller 1,000 block increments, is one means of conserving numbers. Currently, when a company requests telephone numbers they are distributed by NANPA in blocks of 10,000.

The Commission previously ordered number pooling in the Chicago area and in the case of the 847 area code, serving customers in suburban areas north of Chicago, the need for the new area code was delayed by more than two years.

In addition, the Commission indicated it would host public hearings in the 618 region to gather public comment on a geographic split of the area, or an overlay in which only new customers would be assigned the new area code and current customers would retain their numbers. A geographic split would require a portion of the region to change phone numbers to reflect a new area code.

Public hearings will be announced at a later date.

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